

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF GEORGE DALE BURT

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of George Dale Burt, a beloved husband, grandfather, and friend. He passed away peacefully at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Oxford on May 9, 2021. I join his loved ones in mourning his loss.

He was born on February 2, 1937 to Hattie Patterson Burt and George Lee Burt. He attended Oakland High School and Delta State University. He later earned his master's degree from the University of Mississippi. Mr. Burt went on to become the principal of Senatobia High School. It was there he began his thirty year coaching career in football that allowed him to impact countless students.

Dale was an outdoorsman and spent time on the family farm. For twenty-five summers, he served as a park ranger at Arkabutla Lake.

Left to cherish his memory are his wife, Elizabeth Hawkins Burt; children, Teri Lynn Burt Scoggins, David Allen Burt; Carol H. Darby, Patsy Williams; eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Mr. Burt was a dedicated mentor, loving husband, and diligent father. I thank him for his service to the state of Mississippi and offer my deepest condolences to his family and friends.

RECOGNIZING THE FOUNDING OF VFW POST 12205 IN BULVERDE, TEXAS

HON. CHIP ROY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize the founding of VFW Post 12205 in Bulverde, Texas. I wanted to take a moment to congratulate Commander McKinnon and those who helped establish Texas's 290th VFW Post. Over the past several years, the number of veterans in the Spring Branch and Bulverde area has grown tremendously and the need for a new VFW has become ever more apparent. As a member of the Veteran Affairs Committee, it is critically important to me that we have organizations like VFWs present locally to serve our veterans and communities, but also to promote patriotism and the American ideals we desperately need more of today. I have no doubt that this VFW Post will be a source of camaraderie, service, and education. I hope my colleagues in the House of Representatives will join me in congratulating these American patriots at VFW

Post 12205 on their inaugural meeting and success in their future endeavors.

HONORING THE 36 YEARS OF SERVICE OF COUNCILMAN DAVID JORDAN

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Honorable City Councilman of Greenwood, Mississippi, Mr. David Jordan.

Councilman Jordan served on the Greenwood City Council for 36 years representing Ward 6. During his tenure, he helped uplift the community through his superb leadership. He will continue his endeavors by representing District 24 as a member of the Mississippi State Senate. Senator Jordan has served in the State Senate for the previous 28 years assuming office in 1993.

Born on April 3, 1934, in Leflore County, Mississippi, David was the youngest of five children born to sharecropper parents. Growing up working in cotton fields, David always valued education. Through relentless effort, he received his high school diploma and went on to enroll in Mississippi Valley State University. Later, he attended the University of Wyoming.

Due to his undying love for people, he began his career as a science teacher. With a yearning to serve his community, Mr. Jordan decided to run for City Councilman in 1985 which he held until June 15, 2021. At the age of 88, he is married to the lovely Christine Bell-Jordan, and currently resides in Greenwood, MS.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Councilman Jordan for his honorable endeavors to Mississippi communities.

IN RECOGNITION OF CAPTAIN PAUL MCKEEVER'S DECADES OF SERVICE TO THE CITY OF DEARBORN

HON. DEBBIE DINGELL

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mrs. DINGELL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Captain Paul McKeever on the occasion of his retirement from the Dearborn Fire Department after over 25 years of service to the City of Dearborn, Michigan. His significant service to our community is worthy of commendation.

Captain McKeever began his career in public service as a United States Marine stationed at 29 Palms, California and later was stationed across the state of Michigan. After transferring

to the Marine Corps Reserve, Captain McKeever became a member of the Dearborn Fire Department in August 1995. He continued to serve in both military and civilian firefighting capacities until 2017 when he retired from the Ohio Air National Guard with the rank of Master Sergeant.

Captain McKeever joined the Dearborn Fire Department in 1995 and was promoted to Fire Lieutenant in 2007. On June 5, 2012 he was promoted to the role of Captain. A committed leader always willing to go the extra mile for his team, he is a graduate of the Eastern Michigan University School of Fire Staff and Command. Over the course of his extensive career, Captain McKeever has been the recipient of countless awards for excellence in service including the Fire Chief Life Saving Award, Fire Officer of the Year, multiple Meritorious Company Commendations, and a 2019 Certificate of Special Recognition.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Captain Paul McKeever for his exemplary 25 years of service. He has effectively and selflessly served the City of Dearborn in his role as Chief of the Fire Department and has been steadfastly dedicated to the safety of our community. I join with Captain McKeever's family including his wife Meryl and children Paul, Ian, Liam, Grace, and Emma, friends, and colleagues in extending my best wishes to him in retirement.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF MS. MAXINE WHITFIELD PRYOR

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life and accomplishments of Ms. Maxine Whitfield Pryor who will celebrate her 100th birthday on July 25, 2021.

Ms. Pryor was born in the community of Love in Hernando, MS in Desoto County. She has lived in Hernando her entire life. She is the eldest of 8 siblings born to Nathaniel and Dinah White Whitfield. She attended Oak Hill Church School and in 1939 married Bemis Pryor. She and Bemis had nine children, all born and raised in Hernando.

Ms. Pryor is the proud grandmother of 24 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren, and 22 great-great-grandchildren. She is known for her love of God and her community. She has attended both Oak Hill Baptist Church and Knights Chapel C.M.E. Church in Hernando. She is a retired missionary, stewardess, and church announcer. She enjoys sewing, gardening, cooking, and voting during election season.

Ms. Pryor has been a dedicated member of the Hernando community for 100 years and I am remarkably grateful for her lifetime of service.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

HONORING THE LIFE OF GENE
HECKMAN

HON. JIM BANKS

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. BANKS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Mr. Gene Heckman of Columbia City, Indiana. Gene was a beloved member of his community whose work shaped the lives of generations who call northeast Indiana home.

Gene entered the U.S. Air Force upon graduating high school in 1957, marking the beginning of a life of service. Upon being honorably discharged in 1963, Gene returned to civilian life. He married his sweetheart, Karen Rose, and together made the Tri-Lakes community their home.

In 1971, Gene was elected a trustee of Thorncreek Township. Additionally, Gene oversaw the township's public services; served on the Whitley County School Board; helped found the Tri-Lakes Baptist Church; was a member of Gideons International; served as president of the National Solid Waste Association Council and was a member of the Columbia City Rotary Club.

Gene's dedication to his community earned him the opportunity to meet several notable public figures, including President George W. Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, Senator Richard Lugar, and Governor Otis Bowen. Separately, Gene operated his own sanitation business before selling it in 1991.

This is a testament to Gene's peerless devotion to service for which his community, and our country, is grateful. Though he is no longer with us, Gene's spirit endures in the hearts and minds of all those he touched.

HONORING THE LIFE OF HAROLD
KELLER

HON. LLOYD SMUCKER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Harold Keller of Mount Joy, who recently passed away.

Harold will be remembered for his life of service and building a stronger community in Mount Joy. He was a proud Rotarian, serving as President of the Mount Joy Rotary Club. He additionally served as a member of the Mount Joy Borough Council and Mount Joy Chamber of Commerce. Harold and his wife Helen were known as Mr. & Mrs. Santa in Mount Joy, bringing happiness to children and residents for over 35 years. Harold generously supported charitable organizations across the community and supported those in need, for instance, donating food to those impacted by Hurricane Agnes while his own home was flooded.

Harold pursued his professional dream of becoming an auctioneer, opening Keller Auctions in 1960, which is now in its third generation. Harold served during many benefit auctions to support community organizations across the region and in 2012, was inducted into the Pennsylvania Auctioneers Hall of Fame.

Harold enjoyed every moment with his family, and we offer prayers of comfort for those who grieve his passing. Harold is survived by his loving family, including Helen, his wife of 68 years, their eight children, nineteen grandchildren, and 28 great-grandchildren.

HONORING WILLIAM "BILL" WAGNER ON HIS RETIREMENT FOLLOWING MORE THAN FOUR DECADES OF PUBLIC SERVICE

HON. JOHN A. YARMUTH

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. YARMUTH. Madam Speaker, I rise today in honor of William "Bill" Wagner, a dedicated public health servant in my hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, who will soon retire after more than four decades of selfless work for our community.

For the last 40 years, Bill has helped lead Family Health Centers, a federally qualified health center that has grown in size and scope to become one of the largest non-profits in our area, providing health care to more than 45,000 individuals annually. Serving as Family Health Centers' CEO since 1998 and as Assistant Director for 17 years prior to that, Bill oversaw the growth of their brick-and-mortar footprint in our area, expanding the number of health center locations in our region. He also helped oversee their tremendous growth in services provided, in patients served, and certainly in the rise of positive health outcomes for the countless Louisvillians that walked through their doors seeking care.

During consideration and the subsequent implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Bill was at the forefront, advocating for increasing access to care while using his voice and passion for those often unheard. As we worked to expand services across our city, it was Bill's guidance I sought out in order to be sure that we could do the most good possible for the most people. And so, it was no surprise when we saw our uninsured rate plummet as people began receiving the free preventive and other health services now available to them—just like Bill said they would if we'd just work together to make it happen. Along the way, he and his staff never hesitated to go above and beyond what was needed to make sure that our community was well-served, that people received the quality care they needed, and that everyone he crossed paths with knew that Family Health Centers was there and ready to help.

Bill had previously announced his plan to retire in early 2020, but as the COVID-19 pandemic reached our borders and began to spread, he put Louisville families first and stayed at the helm of this critical public health organization in order to help lead us through this public health crisis. Bill's tremendous knowledge on public health matters, his early efforts to help ramp up testing in the communities he serves, and in his continued focus to this day on making sure that vaccines are available and accessible in every neighborhood in our city—especially those that are so often overlooked or underserved—has been invaluable.

Reflecting on his upcoming retirement, Bill said, "I've been guided by the belief that

health care is a right not a privilege. We have a long way to go to achieve this goal in our community, but we have made significant strides over the decades."

I'm proud to share that belief, but I'm even more proud to say that those strides would not have been possible without Bill's selfless dedication to his profession, his wealth of knowledge in the public health field, and his unyielding commitment to improving the lives of our fellow Louisvillians.

Bill has not only improved lives, but has saved them and left a lasting mark on our city, our commonwealth, and this great Nation. I wish him nothing but the very best in retirement and look forward to seeing him soon. Congratulations and thanks for a job well done, my friend.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF JOSH
LUCAS

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of high school senior Josh Lucas who passed away Sunday, May 16. He was an admirable young man with a bright future, and I join countless members of the Tuscaloosa community in mourning his loss.

Josh was a senior at Northside High School meant to graduate on Friday, May 21. He was a football player and enlisted in the Alabama National Guard and intended to pursue a career in the military following graduation. He was known as a hard worker, loyal friend, and a diligent athlete.

I join Josh's friends, family, fellow guardsmen, and teammates in mourning his loss. I can say with certainty Josh would have had an outstanding career in the military. I offer my most sincere condolences to those who had the opportunity to know and love Josh and continue to keep them in my prayers.

HONORING CHIEF SPECIAL WARFARE OPERATOR (SEAL)
ZACKARY MILLER

HON. KAY GRANGER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Ms. GRANGER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of U.S. Navy Chief Special Warfare Operator Zackary Miller, a highly decorated Navy SEAL, who was taken far too early by cancer at the age of 39. He died on June 4, 2021 in Virginia Beach, Virginia with his family, closest loved ones, and teammates by his side. He was an American hero who dedicated his life in service of our country.

Zack grew up in Columbus, Georgia and Mobile, Alabama. In 2000, he graduated from McGill-Toolen Catholic High School where he played baseball, basketball, and was captain of the football team. Zack received a scholarship to play football at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi before transferring to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. He graduated in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in political science.

Zack's athletic prowess and leadership aptitude drove him to enlist in the U.S. Navy in 2004. He first served as an Aviation Ordnanceman onboard the USS *Nimitz* before realizing his dream of becoming a Navy SEAL. During his 16 years in the Navy, he became a highly decorated combat veteran with seven deployments and numerous awards for valor including the Bronze Star Medal with Valor, Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor, and three Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals with Valor, each for distinct heroic actions during combat operations worldwide.

Zack was a devoted son, partner, friend, and teammate. He was known for his unparalleled work ethic that was only matched by his endlessly positive attitude, sense of humor, and charm. Madam Speaker, today I ask my colleagues to join Zack's family, friends, and teammates in celebrating a life well lived, recognizing the sacrifices he made for all of us, and extending our deepest gratitude for his service to our country.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT IS
ESSENTIAL ACT OF 2021

HON. DAN NEWHOUSE

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Madam Speaker, The Second Amendment Is Essential Act will classify, by law, the firearms industry as a "critical infrastructure sector" and those it employs as "essential workers" by amending the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and the USA Patriot Act of 2001. The changes define any business or employees who manufacture or deal firearms and ammunition as critical infrastructure for the purposes of federal guidance to States during an emergency.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 directed the Administrator of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish guidelines for States regarding who should constitute "critical infrastructure workers" in the event of a natural disaster, act of terrorism, or other man-made disaster. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, these individuals have often been referred to as "essential workers."

Similarly, the USA Patriot Act defined "critical infrastructure" as "systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters."

Americans' rights, including the right to keep and bear arms, are no less essential during a state of emergency. In fact, the right to defend one's self and one's home is most essential during a state of emergency. Furthermore, states of emergency merit heightened vigilance to protect against unnecessary and unconstitutional government outreach.

In 2020, gun sales increased by 64 percent as Americans sought to exercise their Second Amendment rights so they could have peace of mind during a turbulent time. Firearms manufacturers and dealers should not be forced by government to close in a time when demand for their products is through the roof. This legislation will ensure that the Second Amend-

ment can be freely enjoyed by Americans when they need it most: in times of crisis.

THANKING CHARLENE BEST FOR
HER SERVICE TO THE HOUSE

HON. STENY H. HOYER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to thank my constituent, Charlene Best, for nineteen years of outstanding service to the United States House of Representatives. She retired on June 3 from her role as Manager with the Asset Management Department of Logistics and Support.

Charlene has had a very distinguished career prior to her House employment. In high school and into college, she worked with the Department of the Navy. After her graduation in 1995, she went to work for the National Science Foundation as an Administrative Assistant, followed by a stint with the Census Bureau from 1999 to 2000. Later, she worked as an Executive Assistant for Booz, Allen, Hamilton.

Charlene had long wished to be a House employee and began interviewing in 2002, earning a position as a Special Assistant for the Office of the CAO in the Office Systems Management. She quickly moved through the ranks and became a Supervisor and, eventually, Manager with First Call from 2007 through 2015, before moving up to her current position. Charlene also served as a Move Coordinator during the many Congressional Transitions and brought her special talents and expertise to Members of Congress and their staffs.

When asked about the highlights of her career, Charlene has said how much she appreciated the mentorship of her boss, Tom Coyne, Chief Logistics Officer, and she credits him with helping her to grow professionally. She has also cited one of her first supervisors, Carol Nichols, as someone who saw potential in her and invested time and energy to help her advance in her career.

One notable contribution that Charlene made to the House was her participation in the lying-in-state of Rosa Parks, for which she earned Congressional recognition. She remembers this event with sober reflection. In addition, one of the most cherished memories from her House career was being present in the Capitol for the first inauguration of President Barack Obama. While relaying the story to my staff, she recalled being in the hallway of the Capitol on the path leading out to the inaugural stage, when President-Elect Obama walked within ten feet of where she was standing and gave her a friendly wink prior to stepping out onto the stage. She loves to tell this story to demonstrate the great honors she has felt working for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Charlene, like so many House employees, had been teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she said that she felt lucky to have spent some 'home time' with her daughter Jordyn, a graduating senior. It was a welcome opportunity to spend quality time with Jordyn before she heads off to college in the fall. In retirement, Charlene is looking forward to enjoying more time spent with her family and pursuing other opportunities.

I hope all of my colleagues will join me in extending our congratulations to Charlene Best for her many years of dedication and outstanding contributions to this House. I wish her many wonderful and fulfilling years in retirement.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF
HERSHEL DEAN HOOD

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of Hershel Dean Hood who passed away at North Mississippi Medical Center on May 16 of this year. I join countless others in mourning his loss.

For three decades, Hershel was a conductor for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. He served in the United States National Guard as a Master Sergeant and was the maintenance contractor at Tschudi Courts in Amory for 15 years. He was also an auxiliary deputy with the Monroe County Sheriff's Department for 17 years. Hershel was known and loved in his community.

At Cason Baptist Church, Hershel wore many hats. He was the choir director, a musician, deacon, and children's worker. He was passionate about music and a member of the Nite-Liters band and the Singing Prophets Quartet. His record "Little Band of Gold" topped charts in England and he was inducted into the Rock-A-Billy Hall of Fame. He frequently drummed for Elvis Presley.

Left to cherish his memory are wife of 56 years, Ann Oliver Hood; sons, Gregory Dean Hood and Andy Hood; sister, Judy Holman; brothers, Billy Ray Hood and Lamar Hood and multiple nieces and nephews.

I join countless Mississippians in mourning the loss of Mr. Hershel Dean Hood. He was a gifted musician, loving husband and father, and a leader in his community.

IN RECOGNITION OF OCCUPY THE
CORNER DETROIT

HON. RASHIDA TLAIB

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Ms. TLAIB. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 8th Annual Occupy the Corner/Detroit event, an initiative hosted by Detroit City Councilwoman Mary Sheffield in Detroit for its continuous efforts and dedication to provide hope and resources to our communities within Detroit.

For eight years, Occupy the Corner Detroit has been an essential event and program to combat neighborhood crime and violence while promoting critical resources such as expungement program information, utility assistance, housing assistance and so much more. This annual event uplifts our residents and neighbors in 13th District strong and provides hope for economic opportunity for those that have been left behind or underserved.

Occupy the Corner Detroit is more than just an event. It truly signifies the importance of

community and the resilience of Detroiters. Occupy the Corner Detroit provides a space of residents to convene and feel empowered to address day to day challenges. I am truly proud to work in partnership with Council President Pro Tem Sheffield in serving the 13th Congressional District.

Please join me in recognizing the hard work of Occupy the Corner Detroit on behalf of the communities of Detroit, Wayne County, and Michigan's 13th Congressional District and congratulate this initiative on eight years of service to the community.

IN RECOGNITION OF DAVID JOHN SHAWVER

HON. MICHELLE STEEL

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mrs. STEEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize David John Shawver as he completes his tenure as Chairman of the Orange County Sanitation District Board of Directors. Chairman Shawver served in this capacity from December 2018 through June 2021. Throughout his tenure, Chairman Shawver has been committed to providing an affordable service to the community and understands the importance of keeping with OC San's mission of protecting the public health and the environment. Under his leadership, Chairman Shawver and the Board of Directors understood the financial hardship COVID-19 created for many of our ratepayers, ensuring the service cost for consumers was less than \$1 per day. Chairman Shawver's commitment to affordable water and water reuse has allowed OC San to move in the direction of recycling 100 percent of its reclaimable flow through the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS), a joint project between OC San and the Orange County Water District. Upon completion of this project in 2023, GWRS will produce 130 million gallons of high-quality water every day, which will be enough water for 1 million residents in north and central Orange County. We thank Chairman Shawver for his years of service and dedication to OC San and the community he serves.

WILLIAM "BUD" MONAGHAN

HON. DONALD NORCROSS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. NORCROSS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor and commend Cherry Hill, New Jersey Police Chief William "Bud" Monaghan, Cherry Hill Police Department.

After 26 years of service, Chief of Police William "Bud" Monaghan is set to retire in October 2021. Chief Monaghan joined the police department in 1995 as a patrolman. He has led the police force since January 2014. During his years as Chief of Police, he worked to strengthen the community by creating close ties with the public. Chief Monaghan built relationships with cultural, religious, youth and civic groups to connect the Police Department with its area.

Chief Monaghan regularly attended community meetings to participate in the discussions

about Cherry Hill's neighborhoods. He is devoted to keeping the area protected and safe. He also focuses on police transparency and up to date technology to continue to provide aid and comfort to the residents.

The Cherry Hill Police Department is committed to protecting both life and property. Cherry Hill, New Jersey is home to over seventy-thousand residents and the police department averages one-hundred twenty thousand calls for service per year. Chief Monaghan and his police department provide the highest level of police service while also enhancing the quality of life in the area.

Chief Monaghan's dedication to the police department and its 136 full-time sworn officers has resulted in a safe and thankful community that fosters growth and acceptance. Chief Monaghan describes his time and service at the Cherry Hill police department as "the honor of a lifetime." His successor will be chosen in the coming months, but it is evident that Chief Monaghan's impact on the Cherry Hill Police Department will be appreciated for years to come.

Madam Speaker, I ask you to join me in honoring Police Chief William Monaghan in his retirement and recognizing his more than two and a half decades of service to the Township of Cherry Hill and their Police Department.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF
LIEUTENANT LANE FOWLER

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the retirement of Corinth Police Department Lieutenant Lane Fowler, Sr.

In 2004, Lt. Fowler joined the Corinth Police Department. His desire to help people was the reason he chose to launch a career in law enforcement. Over the course of his 17-year career, Lt. Fowler fulfilled his duties with a sense of pride.

One of his most rewarding achievements was serving as the leader of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Program. During his eight years working with fifth grade students, Lt. Fowler taught them about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and making good choices with their lives. Lt. Fowler said it was his goal to teach children that law enforcement officers are not to be feared. It was his goal to build good relationships with members of the community of all ages.

On Friday, June 11, Lt. Fowler's retirement was celebrated during a ceremony hosted by his fellow police officers with the Corinth Police Department. It was my honor to thank him for his dedication to the citizens of Corinth and for his pledge to protect their safety. Lt. Fowler's service will always be remembered.

Lt. Fowler is married to Tonia Fowler. They have five children: Kacie Blakney; Johnson Fowler, Jr.; Sidney Robertson; Mikki Holmes, and Justin Holmes. The Fowlers have six grandchildren: Lainey Blakney; Corbin Blakney; Caben Robbins; Eli Robbins; Hadley Holmes, and Anna Grace Holmes.

I am grateful for Lt. Fowler's lifetime of service to North Mississippi and thank him for his commitment to the Corinth community.

COMMEMORATING LGBTQ PRIDE MONTH

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Madam Speaker, this June, we celebrate Pride Month in solidarity with our fellow Americans, and world citizens, who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, also known as the LGBTQ community. We celebrate the courage it takes for LGBTQ people to openly and freely be their true selves, and we celebrate to show them compassion and understanding, even if they have not yet made the decision to affirm their identity publicly.

The struggle to attain full equality for LGBTQ Americans is far from over, but we can take solace in recent triumphs: the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Obergefell v. Hodges, which legalized same-sex marriage in the United States, Bostock v. Clayton County, GA, which prohibited employment discrimination based on sex or sexual orientation, and President Biden's lifting of the ban on Transgender people from serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

But also, during this Pride Month, we must not forget the struggles that lie ahead for the LGBTQ community—most notably, attaining the right to live freely, with equal protection of the laws and without fear of violence or persecution. For many LGBTQ people, especially those of color, this dream is not yet within reach. I implore those Americans that face adversity for their sex or sexual orientation not to despair; as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. paraphrased the words of the abolitionist Theodore Parker, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

It is incumbent upon each and every one of us living in this country to extend the kindness and respect to our neighbor that we, in turn, would wish to receive. LGBTQ Americans live and work in every city and county in our nation. They live in communities that are rural, urban, suburban and everything in between. They are a diverse community that spans all races, ethnicities, nations, and creeds, but they all have one thing in common—they were created by God and in his image.

HONORING REAR ADMIRAL JOHN A. OKON

HON. STEVEN M. PALAZZO

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. PALAZZO. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Rear Admiral John A. Okon for his profound leadership while in command of the Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command (CNMOC) at John C. Stennis Space Center in South Mississippi from 2017 to 2021.

Rear Adm. Okon grew up in Syracuse, New York where he married his wife, Valerie Gessner. Okon first graduated from the State University of New York Maritime College at Fort Schuyler in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science in Meteorology and Oceanography. He also earned a bachelor's degree in National Security Studies from the Naval War

College in Newport, Rhode Island and holds master's degrees in Meteorology and Physical Oceanography from the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California.

While Okon's previous commands include locations such as Osaka, Japan, and Monterey, California, his tenure at CNMOC will be fondly remembered for successes such as procuring funding for a new oceanographic survey ship (T-AGS 67) built at VT Halter Marine Pascagoula, Mississippi, launching the Unmanned Systems Operations Center in the Naval Oceanographic Office, and endorsing a Memorandum of Understanding with NOAA to execute language in the Commercial Engagement for Ocean Technology (CENOTE) Act. He was also instrumental in overseeing several Naval Technology Exercises along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and Port of Gulfport.

Rear Adm. Okon has played an influential role in fostering community engagement by educating organizations on the critical contributions the Navy makes to our National Security. His collection of personal awards includes the Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, in addition to various campaign and service awards.

As the Congressman for the Fourth Congressional District of Mississippi, it is an honor and privilege to recognize Rear Admiral John Okon today for his selfless duty and commitment to the Navy and to the United States of America.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE DEDICATION OF SPC HOLLY McGEOGH MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

HON. DEBBIE DINGELL

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mrs. DINGELL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the dedication of the SPC Holly McGeogh Memorial Highway in Taylor, Michigan. By dedicating this highway in the name of SPC McGeogh, an American hero who paid the ultimate sacrifice, we are ensuring that generations of Michiganders and Americans will remember her name and story of selfless courage. This ceremony held today is an important reminder to us all of her dedication and love of this country. It is important that we never forget the first female soldier from Michigan to lose her life in the war in Iraq.

As a daughter of Dearborn and Taylor, SPC McGeogh wanted nothing more than to serve her country and fight for our freedom. A life-long Michigander and a dedicated member of our military from the very beginning, she served for four years as a Cadet in the Junior ROTC program at Truman High School in Taylor, Michigan.

From Truman High in 2002, McGeogh fulfilled her dream of joining the U.S. Army and hoped to continue her education and begin a career in Army intelligence or psychology. Upon joining the Army, SPC McGeogh was assigned to Company A, 4th Forward Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, and stationed at Fort Hood in Texas. She was sent to Iraq at age 19 where she served as a light truck mechanic. On January 4, 2004, while deployed in combat for Operation Iraqi Freedom, SPC Holly McGeogh and two of her fellow sol-

diers were killed by a roadside bomb outside of Kirkuk.

During her time overseas, she was known to eagerly volunteer for every mission and patrol and taught games like duck-duck-goose to Iraqi children. In one of her final phone calls to her parents, she reminded them that "if she should die, we should remember that she died for a reason." Her family said it best, "Holly is another reminder that our freedom truly is not free."

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the legacy of SPC Holly McGeogh and her unwavering bravery and desire to serve our country. The dedication of the SPC Holly McGeogh Memorial Highway will ensure that all who pass through will recognize her service and honor the ultimate sacrifice that SPC McGeogh has made.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF DALE FORTENBERRY

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life and service of Dale Fortenberry as alderman and mayor of Farmington.

Dale was elected Alderman on July 1, 2001 and served until his Election as mayor on July 1, 2005. Dale diligently served the city of Farmington for 16 years as mayor. During his time as mayor, he worked diligently to acquire \$1.2 million in grants for the City of Farmington to provide wastewater collection, city hall renovation, and to build a city park. His persistence for Heritage Community Park showed when the City of Farmington received a 1st Place award for Community Development at the Mississippi Municipal League Conference in June 2019. He also served 3 terms as Chairman of the North Mississippi Mayor's Association and was a member of the Executive Board of Directors for the State of Mississippi Municipal League and Legislative Committee.

Prior to his career as mayor, Dale supported local Corinth businesses by working at Tyrone Hydraulics for 35 years and Little Brothers Construction for 10 years.

Dale Fortenberry is the youngest son of Buford and Clara Fortenberry. Dale is originally from Leake County. He has been married to Shirley Fortenberry since 1972 and has two children, Sammy and Nancy. He is passionate about the history of the Confederacy, his family, and the citizens of Farmington.

I join many Mississippians in commemorating the life of Mr. Dale Fortenberry. He was a loyal businessman, alderman, and mayor.

INTRODUCING BILL TO COMBAT TRANSNATIONAL WHITE SUPREMACIST EXTREMISTS AND STRENGTHEN INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS ON TRANSNATIONAL WHITE SUPREMACIST THREATS

HON. ANDRÉ CARSON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. CARSON. Madam Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that will address intelligence gaps and sharpen our focus on transnational white supremacist extremist threats. Specifically, this bill will improve our federal intelligence agencies and prioritize the white supremacist extremist threat, including its ties to international groups. This bill builds on previous work done by a number of congressional committees, including the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence's Intelligence Authorizations (IAA) over the past few years.

As the Chairman of the Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation (C3) Subcommittee on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, I am proud to strengthen our earlier provisions in the IAA and introduce this new bill. I am also extremely grateful for the collaborative efforts and support of Chairman ADAM SCHIFF—who joins me as an original cosponsor of this bill, and whose work was invaluable in developing this legislation for introduction today.

This bill mandates that the National Counterterrorism Center—alongside the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security—explore and analyze more completely the ideology and objectives driving white supremacist groups with transnational connections, including their leadership and operational structure. Currently, the United States government too often and too heavily relies on outside research organizations for detailed analysis of white supremacist extremists. It is imperative that United States government's intelligence agencies and subordinate organizations perform the high-level analysis needed to best utilize existing data, add additional data that may be missing, and ensure this is done on a national level. The new assessments required by this bill will allow lawmakers and the public to more completely understand the full scope of the transnational threat and will help foster a sustained examination of its international impact well into the future.

As a former law enforcement professional, I have warned my colleagues for a number of years that the threat of white supremacist extremist organizations has been growing worse. Today, this problem is the top terror threat to American lives, and the United States Government needs to take actions that reflect this heightened priority, especially since the January 6th insurrection and home-grown attack on the U.S. Capitol. While there has been improvement under the Biden Administration, plus increased Congressional efforts, the Intelligence Community continues to place a priority on the international terror groups and their offenses, while ignoring the domestic terror threats. While some were taken by surprise by domestic terrorists that blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, we should never again be caught by surprise—especially when we have the ability and the duty

to prevent future attacks with stronger intelligence assessments.

I strongly believe this bill will complement and enhance the recently announced Department of Justice strategy to combat the domestic terror and domestic violent extremism threats, so I urge all my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this bill.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mrs. RODGERS of Washington. Madam Speaker, on June 15, 2022, I voted against bills En Bloc. Had H.R. 610, H.R. 293, H.R. 587, H.R. 1144, H.R. 1921, H.R. 2008, H.R. 2332, H.R. 2545, and H.R. 3642 each received a standalone vote, I would have voted in support of each bill. I opposed the En Bloc because I oppose H.R. 1703.

RETIREMENT OF JORDAN BARAB FROM THE EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE

HON. ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize the service of Jordan Barab who served as the senior health and safety advisor to the Education & Labor Committee after serving in senior positions in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in two different Administrations. When Jordan announced his retirement from the Committee, Members of the Committee expressed deep appreciation for the expertise he imparted to the U.S. House of Representatives, especially when we were confronted with the spread of COVID-19.

Jordan's experience working to enhance protections for healthcare workers during the H1N1 flu epidemic—when he led the Occupational Safety and Health Administration as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health during the Obama Administration—informed his counsel to the Committee and Congress to have OSHA develop an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. That expertise was also helpful to the Commonwealth of Virginia which became the first state to develop its own emergency temporary standard to protect workers from COVID-19. As a result, other states had a model with which to follow suit.

Jordan also worked with Representative JOE COURTNEY (CT) to advance legislation requiring health care and social service employers to implement plans to prevent workplace violence in the House-passed bipartisan Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1195). He made sure that public employees in states without OSHA protections received workplace violence protections through Medicare. He also worked with Representative JUDY CHU (CA) on legislation to provide OSHA protections for workers from heat stress.

Over the decades, Jordan has been at the forefront of our nation's efforts to make sure workers come home safely from their job every day. He was a key leader in efforts to seek stronger worker protections regarding bloodborne pathogens, tuberculosis, and ergonomic hazards. Jordan also worked for five years to develop safety recommendations to prevent catastrophic chemical accidents at the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigations Board (CSB), as well as nearly two decades as Assistant Director of Research for Health and Safety with the American Federation of State Municipal and County Employees (AFSCME).

In his earlier work with the Committee, under the leadership of Chairman George Miller (CA), Jordan focused on legislation to prevent combustible dust fires and explosions—an issue brought into sharp focus following the 2008 dust explosion which killed 14 and left over 40 injured at a sugar refinery in Port Wentworth, Georgia. Jordan was the lead staffer into the investigations and legislation to prevent the obliteration of workers' lungs from the inhalation of a flavoring chemical used in popcorn called diacetyl. Jordan also examined the underreporting of injuries and illnesses, a practice that undermines effective workplace safety.

Jordan's dedication to the safety of workers has spanned across the Committee, OSHA, CSB, AFSCME and the labor movement. There is no question that there are many workers who avoided injury or illness because of workplace safety improvements that came about because of Jordan's work. He remains a trusted advisor—and may not easily escape our inquiries when we have questions.

On behalf of workers, their families, and the people of the country, I thank Jordan Barab for his service to the public and lasting contribution to workplace safety.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF HENRY RANDLE

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of Henry Randle who recently lost his battle with cancer. He was a brave and selfless community servant and I join countless Mississippians in mourning his loss.

Henry Randle was a graduate of Aberdeen High School class of 1989. He attended Mary Holmes College, Mississippi State University, and the Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Academy. In 2001, he joined the Mississippi National Guard.

Mr. Randle began his military career as an Army Motor Transport Operator. In 2009, he earned a second occupation as a Petroleum Supply Specialist and has served in a variety of leadership positions in Engineer and a Maneuver Unit. Over the course of his career, he has served in the Mississippi National Guard's 223rd Engineering Battalion, served in the Middle East—most recently in 2018 as an E6 staff sergeant. He aided in hurricane Katrina recovery.

Among Mr. Randle's awards include a Armed Forces Reserves Medal with M Device,

Army Achievement Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Reserve Components Overseas TRG Ribbon, Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Combat Action Badge, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal. He joined the Aberdeen Police Department in 1997 and served as a school resource officer. In April of 2008, Mr. Randle was elected as Aberdeen Police Chief.

It was an honor to work with Henry in the Mississippi Guard as well as in law enforcement. Henry Randle was an outstanding community leader who served his state and country well. I am grateful for his life of service to the Aberdeen community and offer my deepest condolences and most sincere prayers for all who know and love him.

JUNETEENTH NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE DAY ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize the importance of celebrating Juneteenth as a national holiday.

For a century after the last slaves were freed, Black Americans were denied the rights considered "unalienable" by the Constitution. Even after July 4, 1776, millions of enslaved people and their descendants would not experience independence for decades. Over the last 50 years, systemic racism has continued to hinder many who strive to live out the American Dream.

Despite the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Black people would remain enslaved in parts of the Confederacy for nearly two and a half years. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, delivering news of the end of the Civil War and of slavery.

The message he conveyed that day was simple. General Order Number 3 declared that "... all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves ..."

The following year, the newly liberated people of Texas began celebrating Juneteenth as a celebration of answered prayers and new opportunities.

This tradition slowly spread throughout the country, eventually becoming a holiday or day of observance in 49 states and the District of Columbia. My home state of Rhode Island has observed Juneteenth since 2012.

While Juneteenth has been widely celebrated among African American communities since the end of the Civil War, the prominence of the holiday has grown significantly in recent years.

I am proud to have supported the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act when it passed in Congress and was signed into law last week. It is my hope that June 19th will serve as a day of reflection and an annual call to recommit ourselves to the American ideals of freedom and equality.

For far too long, our society has denied the promise of these ideals to many Americans.

From the Jim Crow era until today, Black Americans have been the target of racism and bigotry, treated as second class citizens, denied opportunity, and subjected to countless violent attacks by racist mobs and individuals.

Over the last year, the United States has experienced the most intensive reckoning with slavery and its legacy since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

The Black Lives Matter movement and nationwide protests following the death of George Floyd have cast a light on the disparate outcomes that persist for Black people in education, employment, interactions with the police, and numerous other aspects of everyday life.

These disparities contribute to—and are influenced by—the intergenerational racial wealth gap. Recent studies show that Black children face significantly higher rates of downward economic mobility and lower rates of upward mobility compared to white children.

For instance, a Black child born into a high-income family is as likely to end up in the bottom 20 percent of earners as an adult as they are to remain in top 20 percent. In contrast, a white child born to parents with the same income is five times more likely to remain in the top income quintile as they are to fall to the bottom of the income distribution.

The systemic racism ingrained in American society must come to an end. As Members of Congress, we need to face this challenge head on, with clear eyes, open minds, and full hearts. Making Juneteenth a national holiday is a start, but our constituents have shown us that sustained Congressional inaction is no longer an option.

This is the moment to pass comprehensive policing reform, protect and expand voting rights, and remove the vestiges of slavery from our social fabric for good.

In the last two years, the House has passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act and the Voting Rights Advancement Act. The Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys Act was signed into law in December after passing both chambers with overwhelming bipartisan support.

This is the kind of legislation we need to begin unwinding the political, economic, and societal policies that have disadvantaged Black Americans since Reconstruction.

This Juneteenth, I hope my colleagues join me in reflecting on the myriad barriers to opportunity that exist for far too many Black Americans and in promoting concrete actions Congress can take to remove them.

CONGRESSIONAL LGBTQ+ EQUALITY CAUCUS IN COMMEMORATION OF PRIDE MONTH

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, as our country celebrates Pride Month this June, I rise as a Senior Member of the House Judiciary Committee to affirm a basic truth: that we are all equal.

I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. CICILLINE, and the Congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus for organizing this special order in commemoration of Pride Month.

This month serves as an opportunity to recommit ourselves to making equality in every aspect of American life real for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

It also serves as a reminder of both the shared struggle and collective joy found in the history and life experiences of queer and gender non-conforming members of our society.

Our country has come a long way in the fight for justice for all the queer and gender non-conforming members of our society.

The Stonewall Uprisings in Greenwich Village marked a watershed moment in the LGBTQ+ movement, reigniting the fight for justice and signaling a new chapter of progress in our country's quest to ensure that fair treatment is the rule, never the exception.

The Supreme Court's 2015 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* enshrined fair treatment as the rule when the court affirmed same-sex couple's right to marry the person they love, regardless of where they lived.

Our country's commitment to justice has been maintained by the tireless work of advocates and communities at the forefront of social change.

We know, however, that this work is unfinished.

As with every social movement, progress is met by resistance, and that resistance can only be overcome with unmatched persistence and fidelity to a basic truth enshrined in our belief: that all are created equal and worthy of human dignity.

In keeping with this belief, we cannot forget the great champions of this cause, many of which I am proud to claim as fellow Texans.

Sarah Fernandez, Judy Reeves, Tommy Ross, JD Doyle, Dalton DeHeart, Judge Jerry Simoneux, Judge Fran Watson—I thank them for their unwavering advocacy.

I also want to recognize a few organizations that continue to do the hard and necessary work of keeping our communities safe, making them feel seen, and pushing our country towards equality.

The Houston GLBT Political Caucus, Save Our Sisters United, Montrose Grace Place, and the Montrose Center—their work is important and valued.

Lastly, I wish to pay tribute to Monica Roberts and Ray Hill.

Monica Roberts, whose death leaves a gaping hole in the hearts of the LGBTQ+ community in Houston.

Monica worked as a trailblazing journalist and advocate, never failing to center the stories of Black trans people and shining light on the issues often ignored by the media.

Ray Hill co-organized the first gay rights organization in Houston in 1967, fiercely advocated for those living with HIV and AIDS, and always sought to advance the cause of equality, despite the hardships.

There are more than 46,000 same-sex couples in Texas, and about a third of LGBTQ+ Texans are raising children.

According to an analysis by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, approximately 930,000 Texans identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.

If LGBTQ+ Texans were a city unto themselves, they'd be the 5th most populous municipality in the state, just behind Austin, and significantly larger than El Paso.

These families and these individuals all benefit from the incredible advocacy and sacrifice of the aforementioned organizations and individuals.

From the Ryan White Care Act to the Matthew Sheppard Act passed by Congress to the *Lawrence v. Texas* and *Obergefell v. Hodges* decisions announced by the Supreme Court, it is clear that social change cannot simply be hoped for—it must be codified, protected, and expanded to account for the real discrimination still shouldered by the LGBTQ+ community.

In particular, I want to underscore the importance of intersectionality, and recognize that queer people of color face disproportionate burdens ranging from violence against transgender people to higher rates of youth homelessness and HIV infection.

On behalf of LGBTQ+ Texans and all Americans, I call upon the Senate to follow the House's example and pass H.R. 5, the Equality Act now.

I call on my colleagues in Congress to move forward with key legislative priorities ranging from ending HIV criminalization, passing the HIV epidemic plan, and enacting criminal justice reform that puts a stop to policies, which above all harm incarcerated transgender people.

For LGBTQ+ communities to be truly seen—to be valued—in our country, they must be accounted for in our policies and actions, not simply tokenized in political rhetoric and corporate merchandise.

It is time to go beyond political rhetoric and make real the promise of equality, opportunity, and justice for every American—irrespective of who they are and who they love.

Let us be unequivocal in our support and love for the LGBTQ+ community, not just in words, but in actions.

[From the Texas Tribune, April 20, 2021]

Updated: April 21, 2021]

TEXAS LAWMAKERS ADVANCE BILLS BLOCKING ACCESS TO GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE DESPITE OPPOSITION FROM LGBTQ+ TEXANS, MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS

(By Megan Munce)

Equality Texas CEO Ricardo Martinez said Texas has filed more anti-LGBTQ bills this session than any other state legislature.

Before undergoing gender confirmation surgery at age 17, Indigo Giles had to get approval from a doctor, a therapist and the hospital where the surgery would be performed to ensure there were no options left besides surgery. To even get to that point, Indigo's father Neil said it took time-consuming research and several reflections as a family before going forward with the process.

The surgery's impact was immediate, said Indigo, now 19, who identifies as nonbinary. They were able to wear the clothes they wanted to, and their confidence in school and with friends significantly increased. Most significantly, the surgery helped alleviate their severe depression caused in part by gender dysphoria—discomfort related to feeling a disconnect between one's personal gender identity and the gender assigned to them at birth.

But under a slate of legislation moving in the Texas Senate and House, Indigo wouldn't have been able to make such a decision until their 18th birthday. In fact, no transgender child in Texas would be able to pursue puberty blockers, hormone treatment or surgery for the purpose of gender confirmation.

Transgender Texas children, their parents, medical groups and businesses have vocally opposed many of the bills lawmakers are pursuing. Equality Texas CEO Ricardo Martinez said Texas has filed more anti-LGBTQ bills this session than any other state legislature.

"It's insulting," Indigo said. "These lawmakers think that we don't know what we

want with our own bodies and we're not able to say what we want and mean it."

House Bill 1399 would prohibit health care providers and physicians from performing gender confirmation surgery or prescribing, administering or supplying puberty blockers or hormone treatment to anyone under the age of 18. The House Public Health Committee advanced the bill Friday.

Senate Bill 1311 by Sen. Bob Hall, R-Edgewood, would revoke the medical license of health care providers and physicians who perform such procedures or prescribe such drugs or hormones to people younger than 18. The Senate State Affairs Committee advanced that bill Monday.

The Senate last week passed Senate Bill 29, which would prevent public school students from participating in sports teams unless their sex assigned at birth aligns with the team's designation. While that bill would only affect students in K-12 schools, two similar bills in the House would include colleges and universities in that mandate.

SB 29 has been referred to the House Public Education Committee, which is slated to meet Tuesday and hear testimony on identical legislation that was introduced in the lower chamber. On Wednesday night, the chair of that committee told the Houston Chronicle that the companion legislation, House Bill 4042, is likely dead.

"That bill is probably not going to make it out of committee," state Rep. Harold Dutton, D-Houston, told the Chronicle. "We just don't have the votes for it . . . But I promised the author that I'd give him a hearing, and we did."

Last session, Dade Phelan, the Beaumont Republican who is now House Speaker, demonstrated a lack of appetite for bills restricting rights for LGBTQ Texans.

"It's completely unacceptable," he said at the time. "This is 2019."

Last week, Rep. Bryan Slaton, R-Royse City, tried to amend a bill on the House floor that would fund prescription drugs for uninsured Texans so that it would exclude hormone and puberty suppression treatments. That amendment failed after it was noted that existing bills were addressing such treatments.

MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS UNITE IN OPPOSITION TO BILLS

In public testimony this year, transgender Texans and their parents have testified in near unanimous opposition to the bills. Several parents described their experience testifying as "terrifying," worrying their testimony would be used against them should the bills' penalties become law. Under Senate Bill 1646, which the Senate State Affairs Committee passed Tuesday night, they could be labeled child abusers for allowing their children to receive gender affirming treatment.

That bill comes after Jeff Younger attracted the attention of Gov. Greg Abbott and other top Texas Republicans in 2019 after a dispute between him and his ex-wife turned into a court battle over whether he could oppose his child's transition. Younger, among others testifying in support of these bills, emphasized young children's lack of brain development and claimed parents and social media pressure children into identifying as transgender.

But experts say social media and social pressure have nothing to do with it.

"There's literally zero evidence or research to suggest that that's true," said Megan Mooney, past president of the Texas Psychological Association.

According to Mooney, children as young as 2 or 3 can develop ideas about gender identity. By 6 or 7, she said, their sense of gender identity is relatively stable.

Lisa Stanton, a Houston mother, said her daughter Maya began expressing her gender identity as soon as she could talk. Lisa said Maya would speak about a fairy who would use magic to turn her into a girl.

Maya had no access to social media, Lisa said, and neither of them even had the language to discuss gender dysphoria or being transgender. What's more, Maya has a twin brother who Lisa said has been raised exactly the same way as his sister, but has never expressed gender dysphoria.

At 10 years old, Maya hasn't received any medical treatment yet. Lisa said in the future, she may have to use puberty blockers—a medical treatment legislators want to ban, but experts say is completely safe.

Marjan Linnell, a general pediatrician, testified on behalf of six different state and national medical associations and said in committee that "organized medicine stands united to strongly oppose both SB 1646 and SB 1311."

In an interview with The Texas Tribune, Linnell explained that puberty suppression treatment has been used for decades to prevent children from going through puberty too soon. Once those children reach an appropriate age, their treatment stops and natural puberty occurs. Linnell said the same is true for transgender children, for whom puberty can often exacerbate poor mental health.

"The point is to have a reversible treatment that can give them some time," she said. "That not only helps to gain some time to make sure we're making an appropriate and best practice medical decision for these kids and families, but we also know it can be incredibly important for preserving the mental health of our kids that are going through gender affirming care."

THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL OF GENDER DYSPHORIA AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION

Hall, the Edgewood Republican, argued during a committee hearing that gender dys-

phoria would pass after puberty for many children. He claimed that children feeling like they're in the wrong body is akin to them being "tomboys" and "sensitive kids" who could later turn into the "best looking cheerleaders" and "toughest football players" by high school.

But both Mooney and Linnell said puberty can increase rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation for transgender children, and delaying treatment until 18 could worsen the existing disproportionate rate of transgender children who consider suicide.

Indigo described the process of testifying alone as "exhausting and upsetting" after they and other transgender children were faced with legislators and protesters who opposed giving them access to gender confirmation care. The week after Texas considered a bill restricting public bathroom access for transgender Texans in 2017, the Trevor Project reported that the amount of transgender children calling or messaging their national suicide hotline dramatically increased.

Legislators voiced particular concern over whether these treatments may cause irreversible infertility for young children. Experts that lawmakers specifically invited to testify cited disputed statistics and stirred fears that procedures such as mastectomies could be performed on prepubescent children—a claim Linnell called "disheartening," given that breast tissue does not develop until after puberty.

While hormone treatments may cause infertility in some cases, Linnell said it varies and is always discussed with patients prior to undergoing treatment. Surgery, she said, would rarely or never be used until after puberty, and requires several consultations with doctors and psychologists before being approved. According to Mooney, surgery is only recommended when a patient is experiencing so much psychological distress that the only way to resolve it is surgery.

While each bill would only delay treatment until age 18, Mooney said medical treatment is often necessary for transgender children just to make it to their 18th birthday.

In committee testimony, 17-year-old Charlie Apple said the combination of gender dysphoria and social marginalization made him feel uncomfortable with both his body and his own existence. Receiving gender confirmation surgery and hormone treatment, he said, has helped him start to change that.

"I've made friends, I've played in sports. I've had the kind of stupid fun you're supposed to have as a kid, but most importantly, I survived," Apple said. "Without these treatments, I would have most likely been with the majority of trans children not standing here before you, but under a grave-stone."